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ABSTRACT

Some programs in journalism and mass communication have been forced to incorporate limited enrollment strategies, as undergraduate interest in these programs continues to grow. After 4 years of moderate growth, undergraduate enrollments in journalism and mass communication programs increased dramatically in the year 2000. Some of the limited enrollment strategies are very open, such as a selective admissions policy, while others are more inconspicuous, such as changing degree requirements from a B.S. to a B.A. This paper provides a brief overview of enrollment strategies. The paper reports on a content analysis of selective admissions policies conducted of 460 programs in journalism and mass communication. The paper concludes that a larger national study should be conducted to investigate the how, why, when, and where of enrollment management in mass communication programs. (NKA)

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The State of Enrollment Management in Journalism and Mass Communication Programs

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Presented during the panel entitled "All the Students That Are Fit to Teach: Are Enrollment Management Programs Gatekeeping Students Effectively in Mass Communication Programs?" Co-sponsored by the Mass Communications and Public Relations Division, SSCA Annual Convention, April 3-7, 2002.

CS 511 161

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Undergraduate interest in journalism and mass communications programs continues to grow. But resources to accommodate growing enrollments often lags behind. This has forced some programs to incorporate limited enrollment strategies. Some of these strategies are very open such as a selective admissions policy, while others are more inconspicuous, such as changing degree requirements from a B.S. to a B.A. This paper provides a brief overview of enrollment management strategies. The paper concludes that a larger national study should be conducted to investigate the how, why, when, and where of enrollment management in mass communication programs.

Undergraduate Growth

After four years of moderate growth, undergraduate enrollments in journalism and mass communication programs increased dramatically in the year 2000. Total enrollments were up by 11.6% over 1999, and same unit enrollments were up 8.5%.[1] Prior to that, growth from 1996-98 was modest, with 2.3% increase between 1996-97, and 5.7% increase between 1997-98.[2] From 1994 to 2000, undergraduate enrollment in journalism and mass communication programs increased from 128,798 to 168,254 (31%). Part of this is attributed to the growth in programs, from 425 in 1995 to 459 in 2000 (8%). But, as indicated above, much of the growth has been within existing programs. The number of degrees granted is noticeably lagging behind the growth in enrollment,

from 32,847 in 1994 to 38,294 in 2000 (17%). The 2000 annual survey of enrollment and degrees awarded projected continued growth in undergraduate journalism and mass communication enrollments. [3] The growth begs the question of how programs will deal with the increased enrollments if resources do not follow. For many programs, the answer has been selective admission policies.

Review of Entrance Requirements

Oukrop, Brown and Parsons conducted the most comprehensive study of entrance requirements. A number of specific strategies were investigated and compared to a study conducted in 1977. The authors concluded that enrollment management techniques had become more commonplace by 1997. [4]

Starting in the mid-1970s, a number of programs began to include language exams as an entrance requirement to the program or into a required course. In 1977, 27% of mass communication programs required a language skill exam as part of the requirements. By 1997, that number had increased to 31%. By establishing a baseline level of skills for incoming majors, colleges could avoid remedial instruction and limit the number of majors that an overworked and financially strapped department would have to handle. No evidence has been presented that performance on specific language skill exams predicts success in the mass communication programs.

A second common technique has been to establish a minimum grade point average for admission into the major. This mechanism grew in popularity from 4% of surveyed schools in 1977 to 39% in 1997. Many programs link entrance to a student's performance in a specific class or set of classes. It would appear that a minimum GPA in

the introductory course would regulate enrollment to some degree, if the instructor graded on a normal curve. Other programs have linked performance to writing and grammar classes as the test for admission to the mass communication program. A third GPA approach has been to set criteria applied to the cumulative average of students applying to the major. These approaches use the strategy of selecting students who have a successful academic track record. However, they fail to take into consideration that a series of multiple choice exams on journalism history are not a very meaningful measure of a student's potential success in a program. Also, these approaches fail to factor the varying difficulty of the curricula selected by students or recognize the value of the more recent performance of a student who has truly "found the right major" after a prior academic nightmare. As a screening mechanism, the use of the GPA in any form is suspect to the problems of grade inflation that permeates colleges across the country. Merit pay for faculty may also be a contributing factor, as it may lead to faculty members placating students in order to receive high student evaluations.

Yet another mechanism to regulate enrollment is to set a minimum number of credit hours before admission into the mass communication program. Oukrop et al found that 22% of universities surveyed in 1997 employ this procedure in enrollment management. It would seem this approach merely delays the enrollment of some students rather than acts as a true management device.

Another approach that has been used at times is to require a BA rather than a BS degree. Usually this method is developed under the pedagogical motive of wanting mass communication students to appreciate diversity and become more culturally sensitive. In

reality when you talk to faculty members "off the record," the real motivation would appear to be the reduction of the number of students a program has to deal with.

One Program's Answer to the Problem

Over the last three years, James Madison University has embarked on an admission testing procedure that combines some of the aspects of the mechanisms reported above with some variations. Any student who wants to become a major in the School of Media Arts & Design (SMAD) must declare Pre-SMAD as a second major (they may have a content area as a first major or be classified as undeclared) and enroll in our introductory course. In the third week of class, a testing day is announced and students receive a ticket to a computer lab in the department.

The student will take a battery of five tests, consisting of a language skill test, a timed writing prompt, a multiple choice computer knowledge section, a Web page critique and a layout & design exercise. The student is given 90 minutes to take this exam. It is saved to a server and printed out for review by the faculty. The final step in the process is for the student to complete paperwork (copy of a transcript, declaration of major, change of major form and school registration card) and hand it in by the second Friday in February to our main office to be officially considered for admission. Faculty then review each completed application comparing scores on each segment of the admission test and the transcript of each applicant to that concentration. Faculty select the successful candidates according to a predetermined number that each program in the school can handle. Each student indicates three areas of concentration they would be interested in, and we can usually place those students who qualify for admission into

his/her first or second choice. This year 78% of those who completed the process were admitted.

It is important to note the JMU model has not been problem-free. In fact, its problems are similar to the pressures found in other selective admission programs by Oukrop et al: "the hassle of administering the test, the failure of the test to be a good predictor of success in the program, [and] student opposition to such a requirement . . . ." [5]Some faculty have complained about the huge investment of faculty time in monitoring the test (twice a year) and reviewing the files. Others have expressed the fear that some creative students who simply don't test very well will not get into SMAD. In dealing with student complaints, our school chair meets with any student who did not get in to explain areas in which the student needs improvement. (Students can retake the admission test and reapply the following year if they so desire.) This is a huge cost in terms of his time. Additionally, there is a concern about performance of minority students on a standardized test for admission into SMAD. JMU has not compiled statistics on the number of students who are of minority heritage and fail to gain admission to SMAD.

Today, with funds by state legislatures being reduced and enrollment interest in mass communication programs growing, a trend towards pre-admission screening will likely continue to grow. A variety of mechanisms do exist to regulate the flow of enrollment into programs. We thought it would be interesting to see how other programs are managing their enrollment by looking at selective admission policies in undergraduate catalogs.

Selective Admission Policies as Identified in Undergraduate Catalogs

A content analysis of selective admission policies was conducted of 460 programs that offer courses in journalism or mass communication (to include courses in advertising, public relations, and broadcasting). This population includes all programs listed in the 2000 AEJMC directory and is supplemented with additional programs identified in the annual survey of enrollment and degrees awarded. The content analysis was conducted on the online undergraduate catalog of each school.

Seventeen percent of the catalogs identified having a selective admission policy for the communications program (77 of 460). A T-test analysis on the data showed that programs in larger colleges and larger programs were significantly more likely to have a selective admission policy. Programs with selective admission had a average college enrollment of 21,400 compared to 9,215 for programs without ($t=10.12$, $p<.0001$). The average size of a program with selective admission was 537 students whereas those without had 294 students ($t=5.14$, $p<.0001$). This seems to indicate that programs with large student populations use the admission policy as a way to control enrollments.

It was not uncommon for programs to identify more than one requirement as part of the admission process. The most frequent requirement was passing a prerequisite course or courses (62 of 79, 79.5%). Most of these programs required passing courses with at least a C (24 of 55, 43.6%), a C+ (15 of 55, 27.3%) or a B (6 of 55, 11%).

The second most common requirement was a minimum overall GPA (51 out of 77, 66%). The mean for the minimum overall GPA was about a 2.4 on a 4.0 scale. The GPA requirement most used was a 2.5 (20 of 49, 41%), followed by 2.0 (11 of 49, 22.4%). Eleven programs (22.4%) required a minimum GPA greater than 2.5, with three

programs requiring a 3.0. Nearly 59% of the programs required a minimum GPA in the major. Programs that required a minimum overall GPA were more likely to require a minimum GPA in the major (30 of 51, 58.8%). Surprisingly, the major minimum GPA mean (2.3) was lower than the overall minimum GPA mean. The most frequent major minimum GPA was a 2.0 (20 of 44, 45.5%), followed by 2.5 (10 of 44, 23%). Eight programs required a major GPA greater than a 2.5 (18%) with one program identifying a minimum major GPA of 3.2. An Analysis of Variance showed that programs identifying themselves with the name "mass communication" had significantly higher major GPA requirements (mean=2.64) than did programs that labeling themselves "journalism" (mean=2.19) or "communication" (mean=2.27) ($F=4.7$, $p<.02$, Scheffe Post Hoc).

Other selective admissions requirements included the following: filing an application to the major (12 of 77, 15.5%), passing a language skills exam (11 of 77, 14.3%), passing a typing test (9 of 77, 11.7%), passing and admissions test (7 of 77, 9%), and scores on a standardized test such as the ACT or SAT (6 of 77, 8%).

Limitations of Study and Need for Further Research

It is very likely that this study does not provide a comprehensive look at measures being used to manage enrollments because it is limited to the information available on online undergraduate catalogs. Some of the information is probably outdated. Some programs may not list their selective admission policy in the catalog. Other programs may be engaging limited enrollment strategies other than selective admissions, such as changing degree requirements from a B.S. to a B.A.

The study also does not look at what has motivated these programs to develop selective admission strategies. It is assumed that enrollment management is one reason, but there are bound to be others such as enhancing the quality of students in the program. There are other qualitative issues that could be explored about the use of enrollment management strategies that are not explained by this study. Finally, the study does not explore whether selective admissions policies are on the rise or the decline.

It is proposed that a survey needs to be conducted to get a better picture of the current status of enrollment management and how selective admissions policies contribute to program strategy. Included is a preliminary list of possible questions that could be explored with the survey. Please share any other ideas you might have with the authors.

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[1] Becker, Vlad, Huh, & Prine "Annual enrollment report number of students studying journalism and mass communication at all-time high." *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, Vol. 56, No. 3, Autumn 2001, pp. 28-60.

[2] Becker, Kisicki, Hammatt, Lowrey, Shin, & Wilson, "Enrollment and degrees awarded continue 5-year growth trend." *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, Vol. 54, No. 3, Autumn 1999, pp. 5-22; and Becker, Kisicki, Lowrey, Prine, & Punathambekar, "Undergrad enrollments level off, graduate education declines." *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, Vol. 55, No. 3, Autumn 2000, pp. 68-80.

[3] Becker, Vlad, et al.

[4] Oukrop, Brown, & Parsons, "Language exams and entrance requirements: A 20-year update." *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, Vol. 53, No. 2, Summer 1998, pp. 40-44.

[5] Oukrop et al, pp. 42-43.

CS 511 161

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